1911/73

utile

Nelson signal

7-8 Catholicism - as
Westminster Art School
post-impressionism
'under the form of'

- on Map. 230 refer to p. 10
of this letter

X p. 2 Spengler X

Die 19 ianuarii
Naoim ALBERT
Eodem die S. CANVTI REGIS. Martyris
et SS. MARII, MARTHÆ
Audifacis, ABACHVM. Martyrum.
[my colonial, wardha bagful!]
MCMLXXIII.
anno ab Incarnatione Xti.
Dydd Gwener < dies Veneris

Frigedaez hereabouts; yn dir y Saeson-Canol. *

* This is Welsh: means 'in the land of the Middle Saxons'

My Dearest René

Alas, I had no intention of causing you so much labour as you put into your clear type-writ letter, when I asked in a previous letter what you had in mind abt that confounded Nelson signal, I merely wondered if you were concerned with just that one sonant intruded note or whether something far wider, deeper, more profound, affecting the whole Intro. & AM. & more besides was involved, namely the whole business of 'the utile' and 'signa' & all the complexities incanted by these two shorthand words. I see that it was the whole that you found unacceptable, try as you would. So it's far more serious matter.

I can't possibly 'answer' your letter for I have not the ability. But I've read it carefully four to five times and as far as my kind of 'thinkage' goes, I can see the underlying complexities, at least think I can, in my own way. You must remember that whereas you have not only by nature a razor-like intelligence but are grounded in all that a full knowledge of the Classical Languages alone can bring, whereas I can do no more* that gather the drift of bits of stuff at second hand and am a dunderhead in any case in the ~~[illegible]~~ sense of simply not being able to learn things such as the multiplication table or how to spell words in bloody English let alone the real languages. I can perceive things only by some sort of association, – as a cow with a crumpled horn can't very well help recalling that man-the-sacerdos is shaven & shorn for a specific purpose, to make anamnesis by certain acts & said words in that He is

* which accounts for my not being able to see why you are so severe on David Blamires' book especially that he does not understand & misinterprets Plato's meaning.

②

René

of the Order of Melchisedek — so of the cultus that chances to have begun in the Roman Province of Syria Palestina and to have survived from Classical Antiquity bridged the gulf of chaotic decline & become central to the rise of the quite different culture out of which devolved our own western thing — now a 'civilisation' of sorts, in its decay, but even in its winter still showing certain *signa* of the cult without which it could not have been.

I think Spengler's distinction between a 'Culture' & a 'civilization' for all its complexities in any given case, is a much neglected notion, in a sense it corresponds to or has affinity with the business of what we used to call 'The Break'. In a 'Culture' the 'utile' & the 'extra-utile' are, to this degree or that, married, intermeddled; the maiden called 'sign' or 'sacrament', is not by any means wholly ~~forlorn~~ 'forlorn' (to revert to the rhyme about the cow with the crumpled horn). In a 'civilization' the tendency is for the deep things of a true culture-phase, to lose their signification & while the outward forms may to some extent be observed or even, for imperialistic ends, deliberately 'revived'. But the 'utile' is in fact all that matters. Technics may, as you say, be 'built in' to the mammal called 'man' as also in other animalic creatures of the Logos, *per quem omnia facta sunt*, but owing to certain slowly developed thought-processes an obsession with the technological, causes man to be Man-the-Technocrat, then it becomes next to impossible for him to see any sense in the sign-world. He can ~~still~~ & does still require 'entertainment' of every conceivable sort. It is a psychological necessity. Then there are the desires of the body in the love-making sense. But it is extremely difficult for men to even begin to see that the wholly extra-utile act of sending by *Interflora* a bunch of special flowers on some special-day to his beloved is *neither more nor less* of the realm of sign & sacrament, ~~that~~ than is the careful keeping of some given rite proper to some particular day as do those chaps he may chance to know who indulge in what he regards as foolish, out-dated ritual. Well, sorry, I've said all this in many

cf here → Dai on Spengler-Eric E&A pp 288-9

'Cultural activities'

Keke'

various ways before. But to revert to a direct matter in yr letter: You say you take my note about the Trafalgar signal ~~was only really~~ to be "as one extreme example of two opposing views, the other extreme being the Caird passage quoted in E&A & again in the Mariner introduction." Well, NO, it was not meant to involve ~~that~~ these two bugbears. In fact all I was attempting to make clear was that Nelson's intended message was perfect in construction in English, brief, succinct, directly to the point and also the unvarnished truth. He, Nelson, in command of his 'ecclesia' – I dont think the analogy is far-fetched – for he certainly regarded himself very much as the sole determining figure, a commander ~~who~~ in ~~whose~~ whom his whole command confided – what was again true. So "Nelson confides that every man will do his duty" was a plain statement of what he had every reason to suppose would find effectual response. And he was right – indeed the only possible ground for criticism would seem to be "Why make a signal that merely confirmed the actual state of affairs?" Well, I think there was, in Nelson, a slight touch of Monty if you follow my meaning. But leaving any such debatable notions aside as ~~in~~ any case of no moment, and merely comparing the ~~[illegible]~~ reasonable, just and perfectly framed wording – with ~~the signal~~ words actually signalled: "England expects etc." and surely the ~~[illegible]~~ direct truth & perfectly-formed wording of the one makes the other not only greatly inferior & wanting, but also a rather silly & somewhat civvy 'jingoism' – 'England expects' might pass as a piece of 'poetic licence' in some patriotic song or what not, but has nothing of the simple reality of the actual situation. It was Admiral Nelson, well aware of his ~~[illegible]~~ total responsibility his majesterium, so to say, ~~and~~ here it might be recalled that he was himself entirely responsible for the actual strategy ~~to~~ to be employed

cf. Collingwood's annoyance quote ~~at~~ bottom of p.④ over & top of ⑤

④

René

i.e. the chancy & unusual mode of moving to the attack in two seperate columns of vessels in strict line ahead of his whole Classis & with his flagship leading the weather column — if Southy's account can be trusted, this plan of action he explained beforehand to his assembled commanders & that "all were moved, some shed tears." This is taken to mean that the emotion was on account of the excellence and audacity of the plan, but one can imagine that some of the command would have their doubts. But the stategos that made the decision & it appears to have met with recognition of ~~[illegible]~~ its greatness.

With no knowledge of naval, or for that matter land, warfare of that period, ~~it is~~ one ~~easy to~~ would have to be very foolish indeed not to ~~s~~ see. Indeed to almost feel, in ones bones the hazard & ordeal awaiting the vessels moving in line ahead especially the leading vessels of the weather-column should there be an insufficient wind ~~or an unfortunate direction~~ or wind from an unhelpful direction — (as, ~~chanced to be the case~~ — it seems, chanced to be the case) for that would mean a slow advance of ships unable to bring their guns to bear while subjected to considerable fire from the enemy.

That I suppose accounts for that thing we used to like so much when one of the vessels in the weath. column began to make more speed & ~~[illegible]~~ drew level, will or anyway much nearer the Victory that made Nelson immediately ~~say~~ cry out (presumably through some instrument — I think they had primitive things you could bawl into but not sure) no matter:

"I'd thank you, Captain Harvey, to keep your place in line."

Dont know how Harvy is spelt, but know I used to confuse him with Capt. Hardy, Nelson's own captain in the Victory. But the incident shows the concern ~~[illegible]~~ that the Victory with Nelson aboard ~~her~~, should at least not suffer ~~out~~ of proportion before the battle was even joined & again it shows Nelson's absolute determination to abide by his plan of action ~~[illegible]~~ regardless of all else.

You will ~~[illegible]~~ recall, how Collingwood expressed some irritation when 'the Signal' was ~~[illegible]~~ to be seen fluttering from the ~~pennants~~ halliards.

~~[illegible]~~ ⑤

Rose

Collingwood remarked Something to the effect of: 'Why is Nelson bothering us with further signals – we have our commands quite clear – no need for anything more.'

I imagine, perhaps unfairly, that the Officer who suggested 'England' in place of 'Nelson' in addition to a sudden wave of *pro patria* may have, even if half-consciously, felt that Horatius was not the only bloke 'holding the bridge'. But in any case I was not thinking of the complex of possible *reasons* for the change. But simply saying that the signal Nelson intended ~~was~~ was not only vastly superior ~~to~~ in ~~[illegible]~~ form but corresponded with the *actualities* in content.

[redacted]

So I can't see how this involves the complex matter of 'the utile' and the 'extra-utile'.

As I said in a previous letter, it was probably a mistake to have introduced the Nelson signal at all as an example of how 'emendations' nearly always mess things up, as I think they do. But again *not* because of the 'Caird' & 'non-Caird' business. The emendation of Dr Watts' hymn does not involve *that* matter either, does it?

My fault probably resided in giving way to an opportunity to drag in 'The Signal' (A) because it has been so often on my mind and because I *really* do think what Nelson actually meant was superbly expressed, ~~[illegible]~~ 'semantically impeccable' as I wrote – I admit that is a bit self-conscious & too rounded off – but none the less bloody true. (B) I did & do think how jolly nice it would have been had they chanced to mislay the pennant to 'Expects' & also how extra nice it would have been had Horatio's temper ~~[illegible]~~ revealed itself & instead of showing admirable restraint, & had blasted 'em in his usual very nautical fashion (for I understand he was much given to what is sometimes called 'pretty blue' language) and it occurred to me that a shorthand way of conveying that might be arrived at by evoking three words ~~[illegible]~~ attributed to the Roman Procurator when he'd *had just about enough* from the ~~[illegible]~~ priests ~~[illegible]~~ and local representatives of a cult wholly outside his comprehension, to whom he had already, against his conscience & better judgment, ~~a~~ ~~[illegible]~~ handed over to them

Rene

No unusual thing for a civil or military person however highly placed to be no match for ecclesiastical legists & canonists with a well-laid plot.

~~[illegible]~~.

to death by crucifixion, after various attempts to save the victim in whom he could find no offence under Roman law, but as he held his office on the understanding that the Imperial authorities wanted no trouble ~~with~~ arising from the quasi-religious quasi-secular Judaean authorities, he found himself skilfully outwitted*. But this further ~~request~~ demand by the leaders & the Sanhedrin touching the wording of the charge ~~against the~~ on the superscription to fastened to the stake of the already immolated* victim was too much and was instantly dismissed. The full determining words are best felt when sung out by the ~~deacon during the passion~~ the minister to whom the words of Pilate are allotted a special tone in the Liturgy for Good Friday. It is from the memory of hearing them so chanted that remain fixed in my mind.

*or if not actually yet immolated at least under guard ~~at~~ the place of execution

No more connection than that, but in thinking of Nelson's amended signal & his being accredited with the use of nautical English of some strength I recalled the 'Samnite of the Pontian gens' who I've always had a thing about – if only ~~[illegible]~~ that to me he seemed very ~~[illegible]~~ like a distracted British official trying to manage some area of our once far-flung Dominions where the natives had cult-practices altogether alien to him but which Whitehall gave him to understand he must on no account disregard or he'd find himself in serious trouble.. And ~~[illegible]~~ Ponty's wife too, Claudia Procla, fits perfectly with one type of English official's Theosophically minded wife – interested the native cults. You know the type exactly*. That's all there was behind that blasted note. Also I thought it might amuse you.

*and Hanna has sometimes remd me of & also Penelope Betjeman & things in Forster's Passage to India.

Lots of other parts of yr letter I wholly agree with. But, after all, I've never done ~~[illegible]~~ much more than ask questions touching this business of 'utility' & 'sign'. Even already in the Preface to I.P. I ask how we are going to feel chemical discharges etc as extensions of ourselves as we have so far managed to ~~feel~~ feel about 'cups wands & swords'. I haven't got the bloody book with me here – or at least I can't find it.

Yes, I agree about dear Eric re techniques – I always was in doubts about that with him. But ~~the~~ the exact nature of my

Rene

'disagreement' in his case, while in a sense simple, is of appalling complexity to state. For one thing he *seemed* to think, ~~that~~ [illegible] as indeed, in varying ways – in *very* varying ways did all kinds of blokes – with whom one otherwise agreed, ~~[illegible]~~ — No, sorry, can't proceed with that one. Too difficult to sort out at the moment.

About 'numinous', yes of course a word at the moment ~~[illegible]~~ much in vogue rather as 'significant form' was in the nineteen twenties which angered Eric because he used to ask "significant of what?" I never thought that quite fair because it ~~was~~ had a meaning, however unsatisfactory in itself & leading to a disastrous new academism in for example the later productions of the London Group, not unfairly called by a chap I knew as "Cézanne mixt with rice-pudding". But now, even ~~this~~ these Roger Fry Bloomsbury boys did mean by it a work that was a 'thing' in itself with its life deriving from a juxtaposition of forms. It is easy to see how ~~this~~ conscious juxtaposing of forms fairly soon became in practice a mere 'formalisation' of a special kind & then of an exceedingly dull & depressing kind. But in origin it was an attempt to assert the principle that a work to have *realitas* must have an informing principle, rather as the theologians say 'the soul is the form of the body' using the word *form* in exactly the opposite way as the vulgar use of 'form' as ~~[illegible]~~ meaning shape. Anyway when I was discharged from the 23rd Regiment of Foot ~~&~~ in 1919 was ~~[illegible]~~ at Westminster Art School & having been inwardly, ~~[illegible]~~ increasingly since 1917 'on the road to Rome' used to say to the couple or more Catholics ~~[illegible]~~ as fellow art students at the Art School in Vincent Sq. (and slipping out from the Life-class to go to (High Mass at the Cathedral for half a hour) I used to say, 'But ~~[illegible]~~ is it not clear that this thing, these acts & formulae at the *mensa* according to Catholic dogma tied up, show forth

Rono

under the appearance of certain signs ~~[illegible]~~ a reality which is quite other. Has then what we, or anyway, to 'Post-Impressionists' & 'significant form' wallahs, by analogy a very ~~[illegible]~~ similar intention. "This may be ~~under the [illegible] of [illegible]~~ made of pencil or paint or what you will but it is in fact such & such a human body or a hill slope under the form of those materials. This was thought a pretty far-fetched & rather dangerous idea, more especially by my two Catholic friends because, they said, but in the Mass a change of substance is actually effected, whereas artists who speak of their making in ~~[illegible]~~ that way ~~[illegible]~~ is no more than a way of expressing a thing now in vogue. ~~To~~ which I replied, of course but by analogy, they are speaking in not dissimilar terms. The desire is to make the flesh & blood Dorothy Price – a model we sometimes had or his sister (Anita I think) a Miss Price under the appearance of chalk or paint. So, in theory, this Post Impressionist ~~[illegible]~~ intention is nearer than the Impressionist intention, to what the Church on another level altogether asserts she actually causes to be. In practice, of course, it is another matter altogether, for it depends on the artistry of the maker & at all times centuries & millenia before 'Impressionist' ~~the~~ or 'post Impressionist' theory was dreamed of a great art-work of no matter what school or kind was a work in which the forms were so juxtaposed as to show forth under this or than media something other – some realitas.

The term ~~the~~ 'abstract' I regretted as it was, in my view, wrongfully ~~[illegible]~~ used, because there must be an 'abstract quality' in any work otherwise it could have no 'being' but it also must of necessity 're-present'. Unfortunately (to my way of thinking) the ~~the~~ term has by now created ~~the~~ a vast gulf. It has also produced some very great works, but I regard the assertion of total distinction between 'Abstract Art' & 're-presentational art' as fundamentally ~~[illegible]~~ untenable.

Take what you like, a La Tène sword ~~[illegible]~~ scabbard of the 3rd ~~BC~~ BC ~~or~~ or a 7th Cent ~~AD~~ Irish MS or Stone shaft Cross or metal reliquary etc ([illegible]) or A painting by ~~Paolo~~ Piero della Francesca or Turner or Botticelli's 'Prima Vera' or Rembrandt's Claudius Civilis ~~fragment~~ or the very best explicitly 'Abstract' of dear Henry Moore all depend ~~[illegible]~~ on being 'things' whose related 'forms' are significant & ~~[illegible]~~ like the city envisaged in Vulgate Ps 121. cujus participatio ejus in idipsum

which is 'compact together' (Douay & A.V.) ('bound firmly together' RSV) ('one united whole' (Jerusalem)

fragment

You mention the word 'numinous' as being used a lot these days as a convenient ~~want~~ adjective for ~~certain~~ reviewers to use conveniently of a certain quality when they are at a loss to think of some exact word & that has become rather in vogue – I agree, but I dont think it ~~is merely a~~ merely ~~surrogate for 'luminous' sounds~~ seems to mean something because it rhymes with 'luminous,' as you suggest. You say it's real meaning is having supernatural potency, whether of Juno in her anger down to "some tin-pot little river god." Surely it can be used, if only by analogy, for whatever is informed by a 'shining through' of something is not strictly 'supernatural' at all events resplendent & having an haeccity that shines out in some way as on page 1 of The Ana I speak of "the failing ~~[illegible]~~ numina / of column and entablature, the genii of spire & triforium" in contrast to the "cramped repeats of their dead selves" merely to indicate the difference between the work of "the young-time, the sap-years" and the work a later epoch ~~that~~ the ~~[illegible]~~ works of which are 'dead repeats' and whose visible forms show little or no ~~informing [illegible]~~ creativity. the informing numina being long since dead or fled to vivify ~~quite~~ other works.

"No artefacture no Xlian religion" In putting it thus I was trying to make as emphatic as possible that the central rite of our culture & without which that cult could not have been was instituted at the Abendmahl by the Logos Incarnate, himself the Offerand and the Victim & what was ~~oblated~~ oblated was under the form of Bread & Wine both quasi-artefacts and both demanding ~~[illegible]~~ artefacture of various kinds.

I listed some of the labours required in the essay in E&A called 'Art & Sacrament'. According to our earliest documents what was done at the lighted board with his chosen turba seated ~~was~~ was by his command made to be repeated for an anamnesis of him. The ritual ~~[illegible]~~ Oblation committed him to his actual Immolation by the execution-party on the Friday. The Oblation itself, under the same species of Bread & Wine had, two millennia back been foretokened by ~~Melchisedec~~ the King of Salem, ~~priest~~ summus sacerdos tuus Melchisedec

It is astounding how this figure of vast importance is so very seldom mentioned by theologians – even ~~though~~ his rite was pre-Levitical & that what made say in The Ana, p.230

"Levites! the new rite Gods
is here
before your older rites began"

I meander as usual, but it is surely simply a matter that is integral to the Xtian mythos that the Sacrifice of the Mass could not be without the cult-men at the mensa ~~handle~~ handling certain made things. The Xtian religion is committed to certain bodily manual acts. It is not a matter of mental God-directed thoughts only.

'You say that 'No artefacture, no Xtian ~~Religion~~ cultus' means, in fact, 'No artefacture, no ~~[illegible]~~ man'. But surely ~~as~~ far as anything I've ever written ~~is~~ is in the nature of 'asking questions' concerning the effect of obsession with 'technocracy', the 'utile', the Dr Caird thing, now ubiquitous, tends to alienate the ~~[illegible]~~ mind of the creature we call 'man' from all that has hitherto belonged to him as 'man-the-artist' man the 'sign' of 'sacrament-maker,' & so be deprivative of the perceptions & acts that belong to man as "poeta", & so one has asked what this leads to – perhaps a kind of sub-man I've never said more ~~than~~ than voice the dilemma. In the Preface to In Paren. I express some doubt as to whether the newer western 'gas' etc will